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USSR - MIDDLE EAST: MOSCOW IS INTENT ON MAINTAINING THE DIPLOMATIC MOMENTUM GENERATED BY ITS NOTE OF 30 DECEMBER ON THE MIDDLE EAST.

ACTING FOREIGN MINISTER SEMENOV CALLED IN AMBASSADOR THOMPSON ON 8 JANUARY TO URGE JOINT SOVIET-AMERICAN EFFORTS TO FACILITATE AN AGREEMENT.

HOWEVER, SEMENOV WAS RELUCTANT TO SPELL OUT FURTHER THE SOVIET POSITION ON A NUMBER OF CRUCIAL ISSUES WHICH WERE HANDLED AMBIGUOUSLY IN THE RECENT NOTE.

AMONG THESE ISSUES ARE THE QUESTIONS OF ISRAELI ACCESS TO THE SUEZ CANAL AND A SETTLEMENT OF ARAB-ISRAELI BOUNDARIES. SEMENOV INDICATED THAT THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT IS LOATH TO BE PINNED DOWN ON EITHER QUESTION AT THIS STAGE, BUT HE DID IMPLY THAT MOSCOW CONSIDERS THAT THESE ARE MATTERS TO BE WORKED OUT BY THE PROTAGONISTS THEMSELVES AS PART OF A "PACKAGE" SETTLEMENT.

SEMENOV SUGGESTED THAT THE SUEZ QUESTION WAS COVERED BY THE NOTE'S REFERENCE TO ASSURING "FREEDOM OF NAVIGATION IN INTERNATIONAL WATERWAYS." HE REFUSED, HOWEVER, TO BE DRAWN OUT ON THE BOUNDARIES QUESTION. SEMENOV NONETHELESS REPEATEDLY REFERRED TO THE PLAN AS A "SERIOUS" EFFORT TO FIND A "STABLE" PEACE.

IN AN EFFORT TO GIVE FURTHER ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE FRENCH, MOSCOW IS TAKING AN EVEN MORE POSITIVE LINE WITH PARIS ON PROSPECTS FOR A SETTLEMENT. ON 6 JANUARY, SOVIET DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER KOZYREV TOLD A FRENCH OFFICIAL THAT MOSCOW BELIEVES IT CAN PERSUADE CAIRO TO AGREE TO ALL ASPECTS OF A SETTLEMENT BEFORE ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL BEGINS,

KOZYREV ALSO SAID THAT MOSCOW HAS NO OBJECTIONS TO BORDER ADJUSTMENTS OR TO GIVING ISRAEL ACCESS TO THE SUEZ CANAL.

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